

USDA/Rural Development

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News Release

TX-026.04

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USDA ANNOUNCES \$325 MILLION AVAILABLE FOR ECONOMIC INVESTMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

WASHINGTON, March 5, 2004—The U. S. Department of Agriculture today announced that it is making \$325 million in loans and grants available to rural communities to strengthen distance learning and telemedicine programs that serve rural America.

“Bringing specialized health care and expanded educational programs to rural areas will save lives and improve the quality of health care for residents who live in more sparsely populated areas of the country,” said Acting Under Secretary for Rural Development Gilbert Gonzalez.

Telemedicine technology makes it possible for doctors to examine and direct the treatment of patients without being physically present. The distance learning program finances equipment to expand educational resources to students and educational institutions in isolated rural areas. Since the beginning of the Bush Administration, over \$100 million has been invested in local distance learning and telemedicine programs, allowing 1,384 rural educational facilities to expand their access to modern telecommunications technology, and 658 health care institutions to develop technologies needed to enhance local medical care.

“Rural Texas communities can benefit from the opportunities provided by the distance learning and telemedicine programs. These programs are among many that USDA Rural Development can utilize in our on-going commitment to the future of rural communities,” said Texas State Director Bryan Daniel.

Applications for \$15 million in grants must be submitted by April 30, 2004 and will be scored and awarded on a competitive basis. Applications for the grant/loan combinations and loans can be submitted through out the fiscal year and will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. Additional information on the USDA Rural Development distance learning and telemedicine program for 2004 is available at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

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